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- ART. V.—1. *A Statistical and Commercial History of the Kingdom of Guatemala in Spanish America, containing important Particulars relative to its Productions, Manufactures, Customs, &c. with an Account of its Conquest by the Spaniards, and a Narrative of the principal Events down to the present Time.* By D. DOMINGO JUARROS. Translated by J. BAILY. 8vo. pp. 520. London. 1823.
2. *Constitucion de la Republica Federal de Centro-América, dada por la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente en 22 de Noviembre de 1824.* Guatemala. 1825.
3. *Constitucion del Estado del Salvador.* S. Salvador. 1824.
4. *Constitucion Politica del Estado de Nicaragua, decretada y sancionada por la Asambléa Constituyente en el Año de 1826.* Guatemala. 1826.
5. *Mensaje del C. MANUEL JOSE' ARCE, Presidente de la Republica de Centro-América, al Congreso Federal.* Guatemala. 1826.
6. *Discursos de JOSE' DEL VALLE, en el Congreso Federal de Centro-América de 1826.* Guatemala.
7. *El Liberal. El Indicador. El Centinela del Salvador. Redactor General.* [Newspapers printed in Central America.]
8. *Proyecto de Reforma del Sistema de Hacienda y Erection de un Banco Nacional de Centro-América, por J. M. R. [S. JUAN MANUEL RODRIGUEZ.]* Guatemala. 1827.
9. *Manifiestos y Decretos del Gefe del Estado de Guatemala y del Presidente de Centro-América; Cartas de los Gobiernos del Salvador, de Honduras, Nicaragua y Costa Rica, &c. &c.* 1826-7.

THE ancient kingdom of Guatemala, now the Republic of Central America, the least known of the great political fragments of the Spanish empire in the West, is by no means the least important. Destitute of commercial relations with the United States, and the maritime powers of Europe, and less distinguished than other portions of Spanish America, by the possession of abundant mines of gold or silver, it remained, until the period of its independence, in comparative obscurity.

Long after the stormy course of the revolution had begun to convulse Colombia, Buenos Ayres, Chile, and Peru, consigning them to the ravages of hostile invasion, or the scarcely more tolerable effects of civil discord, Guatemala continued tranquilly subject to the dominion of the mother country. Even the disturbances in the contiguous government of Mexico, failed to interrupt its repose, or produce any manifestation of the revolutionary spirit among its inhabitants. Guatemala appeared to be overlooked in the all-absorbing interest, awakened by the career of its more powerful neighbor, in whose fate its own was inevitably involved.

Such was the situation of Central America, when the act for acknowledging the national existence of the new republics, that proud testimony of our country's public justice and political magnanimity, was passed, with the unanimous approbation of the people. But those circumstances, which induced the Council of the Indies, to give Guatemala a separate government, influenced the inhabitants in their choice of a political system, when the yoke of colonial servitude was finally broken. They desired that independence as a nation, which they had always enjoyed in substance as a province, and which their population, geographical extent, resources, and local position, gave them reasonable pretensions to demand. Fortunate in one respect, beyond most of their compatriots, they have had no foreign armies to struggle against, for the achievement of their freedom; and, although nearly the last to raise the standard of independence, they have been among the first to complete the organization of constitutional forms of government. Availing ourselves of the information contained in the publications, enumerated at the head of this article, we shall present our readers with a brief account of the past and present condition of the new republic.

As regulated before the revolution, Guatemala comprised most of the isthmus, which unites North and South America, stretching along from Yucatan and Tabasco to Vera-gua, with the Atlantic ocean on one side, and the Pacific on the other. The Republic of Central America is intended to cover the same territory, and for the purposes of the confederation is divided into the five states of Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. To these the province of Chiapas properly belongs, and has been united, we believe, since the adoption of the federal constitution by the

other states. It needs only the bare inspection of a map to show how favorably this region is situated, in a geographical point of view, for cultivating commercial intercourse, either with other parts of America, or with the nations of both Asia and Europe. Although the seacoast on the Atlantic side is insalubrious, like that of Mexico, and subject also at certain seasons of the year to violent storms, yet it is accessible on each sea by means of numerous harbors ; and rivers, communicating with the interior of the country, intersect it in every direction. Whilst Guatemala lay buried in the darkness of Spanish colonial administration, the advantages of its position, although known to the world, were held of little account, because it required the intervention of a revolution to create the possibility of converting them to any useful purpose. Its revenues hardly sufficed to defray the expenses of its provincial government. The Spanish king, \* who neither knew where Honduras was, nor what were his own possessions there, probably knew still less of Guatemala ; and his successors, bred in equal imbecility and ignorance with himself, might never have heard of its existence, but for the superior excellence of the cocoa produced in Soconusco, which was gathered to be made into chocolate for the especial use of the royal table. And although in Guatemala we discover fewer traces of the horrid tyranny, which the Spaniards exercised over many parts of America, yet the single fact, that so fine a country remained until lately with its resources unappreciated, and almost unknown, speaks volumes against the barbarous maxims of misrule, to which its prosperity was relentlessly sacrificed. Guided by the principles, and stimulated by the invigorating spirit of liberty, we may, perhaps, hope to see Central America one day become the point of union for the commerce of both oceans.

Next to the position of Guatemala, the most remarkable of its natural features is the number of its volcanoes. Of these the volcano of Ometep is worthy of note, for its situation upon an island in the great lake of Nicaragua. That of Tajumulco, in the old province of Quezaltenango, is subject to frequent eruptions, notwithstanding which there is a considerable village at its base. Near the village of Masaya, in Nicaragua, is the volcano called Nindirí, which discharged a torrent of lava into

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\* *Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. 17.

the lake of Masaya, in 1775, destroying the fish in the lake, and heating the lands adjacent to its course, so that the cattle pasturing on them perished. Not far from the village is an extinct volcano, called *Infierno de Masaya* by the *Conquistadores*, in whose time 'it was the most remarkable one in the kingdom of Guatemala. If the historians of that day may be credited, the crater of this volcano was constantly filled with molten lava, or with metallic substances in a state of fusion, which frequently boiled up, and emitted a brilliant light, illuminating the country for miles around, and distinctly visible twentyfive leagues off at sea. But these volcanoes are now all insignificant, compared with those in the neighborhood of the city of Guatemala.

The site of the capital, it should be premised, has been twice changed. Originally it was built on the spot called Ciudad Vieja, from whence it was removed in 1541, about a league to Old Guatemala, and in 1776 was finally established at New Guatemala. These successive removals were the consequence of disastrous earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, which frequently occurred in the tract where the old cities were founded. Ciudad Vieja stood at the foot of a lofty mountain, called Volcan de Agua, northeast of which is Old Guatemala. This mountain is of a conical shape, covered with a fertile soil, and surrounded by villages, and valleys producing the most luxuriant crops. Standing on its summit, the spectator can embrace at one view the most sublime and splendid prospect in nature. Near at hand are the mountains of Pacaya, and Volcan de Fuego, amid rich farms and numerous hamlets, the city of Guatemala, the village and beautiful lake of Amatitan, and a country remarkably picturesque in its features. Farther off may be seen the Atlantic ocean on the north, the Pacific on the south, and on each hand a vast extent of land from the city of San Salvador to the plains of Chiapa. Every thing attractive and delightful, which the bounty of nature affords, is profusely lavished over this charming region, which yet is visited by a curse that renders all its blessings unavailing. It forms the roof of a range of subterraneous vaults, teeming with pent up fires, which often convulse the earth, and occasionally burst forth in most terrific explosions.

At the summit of the mountain, called Volcan de Agua, is a kind of crater, although no tradition exists of its having ever emitted fire. But in the morning of September 11, 1541,

after long continued rains, and eruptions from the Volcan de Fuego, accompanied by violent shocks of earthquake, an immense torrent of water rushed down from the crater, forcing before it enormous fragments of the mountain, which overwhelmed the ill-fated town of Ciudad Vieja, and buried many of its inhabitants under the ruins of their dwellings. Their removal to the site of Old Guatemala afforded them but a short respite from calamity. Besides being visited, from time to time, by dreadful epidemics, which raged with fatal malignity, the city was again and again half destroyed by earthquakes, attending volcanic eruptions from the mountains of Volcan de Fuego and Pacaya, between which it stood. Each of these mountains is divided into three peaks at its summit, having several openings. Earthquakes occurring every week for a year or two at a time; vast clouds of ashes and smoke that obscured the sun and rendered artificial light necessary in the city at midday; fire pouring forth incessantly for months together; showers of heated stones;—such are some of the horrors, to which the vicinity of the volcanoes of Guatemala is subject. On one occasion, in the year 1664, the crater of Pacaya vomited forth a pillar of flame so enormous that the city, at the distance of seven leagues, was illuminated at dead of night by a light scarcely inferior to that of noon day. It was one of these tremendous convulsions of nature, continuing at short intervals throughout the latter half of the year 1773, that completely destroyed the city of Old Guatemala, and compelled the inhabitants to abandon their homes, that they might escape the repetition of the terrible catastrophe.

Previous to the Spanish conquest, Guatemala was peopled by various nations of Indians, whose descendants still compose the great mass of its population. No less than twenty-six different languages are enumerated, as peculiar to the various tribes dwelling in this region. The predominant people were a tribe of the same Toltecas, who subjugated Mexico, and extended their conquests far into Guatemala, subduing the Chichimecas, the primitive inhabitants of the country.

It requires careful and repeated perusal of the prolix and confused statements of Juarros, thrown together with scarce any pretensions to method or connexion, to obtain a correct idea of the aboriginal history of Guatemala, and its subsequent political vicissitudes. But from his scattered details we may

gather that, according to the Indian traditions, a large body of the Toltecas left Tula, in Mexico, under the guidance of Nimaquiche, in quest of less crowded settlements, and, after various wanderings, established themselves near the lake of Atitan. Nimaquiche, having died previously to this, was succeeded by his son Acxopil, who caused his tribe and country to be distinguished by the name of Quiche, in honor of his father.\* He divided his conquests into three parts, fixing his own capital at Uatlan, as the head of the Quiches. To his first son, Jiutemal, he gave the kingdom of the Kachiqueles, or Guatemala; and on his younger son, Acxiquat, he bestowed that of the Zutugiles, or Atitan. This partition subsisted, after many alterations of more or less extent, until the conquest of Mexico by Cortez, when a prince, named Tecum Umam, reigned in Uatlan.

Our author relates these facts on the authority of manuscript histories, by caciques of the Quiche, Kachiquel, and other Indians, who, like the son of Montezuma in Mexico, and the Inca Garcilasso in Peru, busied themselves after they were made acquainted with the Spanish language, in the melancholy duty of recording and preserving the traditions, whether fabulous or true, of their ancient victories, and their departed grandeur and independence. Our readers would not thank us for our pains, if we should attempt to narrate the petty wars and civil vicissitudes, of which the history is thus obtained. The absurd story related by several of the Indian caciques, ascribing the origin of their race to the dispersed ten tribes of Israel, would shake our faith in the whole of the early traditional history of Guatemala, were not the main facts confirmed by other evidence less capable of error and distortion, than mere scattered traditions.

Guatemala was subdued by Pedro de Alvarado, acting under commission from Cortez. He left Mexico on this expedition in 1523, accompanied by three hundred Spaniards, and a large body of auxiliary Mexicans, Tlascaltecas and Cholutecas, having the tried officers, Pedro de Portocarrero and Hernando de Chaves, as second in command. They could not effect the subjugation of the country without many sanguinary battles, in which, it is true, most of the loss was on the

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\* The name of *Nimaquiche* is analogous to that of Charlemagne, signifying *Great Quiche*.

side of the Indians, but the Spaniards themselves did not escape unharmed. The chief part of these engagements occurred in the districts of Suchiltepeque and Quezaltenango, where the Indians still preserve a lively recollection of their ancient disasters. A river flows into the Pacific, through these two provinces, called Sigüila in the beginning of its course, which at the close is changed to Zamalá. An intermediate part of it bears the name of Xiquigel, which signifies *the river of blood*. It was in the neighborhood of this stream that the Quiche Indians made their most resolute stand. They killed great numbers of the Mexican and Tlascaltecan allies; and attacked the Spaniards with the fury of desperation. Immense bodies of them pressed around the Castilian cavalry, their bravest even clinging to the legs of the horses, and endeavoring to drag them and their riders to the ground by main force. But the mailed Spaniards (Teules, or divinities, as the unfortunate Indians termed them) opened a fire of musketry upon the dense multitudes around them, and inflicted the most dreadful slaughter upon the half-clad Quiches. A series of six of these desperate actions was fought in a short space of time, and the waters of the Zamalá, reddened by the carnage of the victors and vanquished, acquired the melancholy name of ‘the River of Blood.’

A succession of similar battles ensued, before Alvarado was able to break the resolution, and dissolve the union of the Quiches. And when their king, Tecum Umam, was slain in battle, and their best and bravest had fallen by his side, they had recourse to a stratagem, only to be matched in vigor and dignity by a similar effort in our own times. They decoyed the Spaniards, under pretext of submission, into the city of Utatlan, the court of their princes, abounding in sumptuous edifices, hardly surpassed in splendor, according to the concurring testimony of writers, by the Indian palaces and castles of Mexico and Cusco; a city so populous, that *it is said* seventy thousand combatants were drawn from it to oppose the Spaniards. It was a walled city, having but two points of approach, one by a causeway, the other by a narrow flight of steps; and the buildings stood high and compact. The Quiches devoted this their principal city to the flames, in order to destroy the Spaniards lodged within it; and but for the untimely treachery of the Indians of another tribe, Alvarado and his followers would have been buried beneath the smoking ruins of Utatlan.



But the genius of the Spaniards prevailed ; and Alvarado added victory to victory, until he was completely master of the country. Owing to the peaceful reception he met with from the Kachiquel tribe, after he had subdued the Quiches, he had it in his power to establish his government at Guatemala, in 1524, calling his capital, Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. Having fixed his headquarters here, he proceeded, with greater facility, in subjugating the remaining tribes, who yielded, one after another, to the universal ascendancy of the Spanish arms.

To enter into the condition, or character, of the aboriginal inhabitants of Guatemala is beyond our purpose. That they, like the Mexicans and Peruvians, had attained to partial civilization ; nay, that a people had gone before them, of no contemptible degree of refinement, is sufficiently evinced by the vestiges, which remain of their permanent structures. Near the village of Palenque, in the province of Chiapa, are the ruins of what must once have been an opulent city ; the capital, perhaps, of an empire, whose very name is lost to history. ‘This metropolis,’ says Juarros, ‘concealed for ages in the midst of a vast desert, remained unknown until the middle of the eighteenth century, when some Spaniards, having penetrated the dreary solitude, found themselves, to their great astonishment, within sight of the remains of what had once been a superb city, six leagues in circumference ; the solidity of its edifices, the stateliness of its palaces, and the magnificence of its public works, were not surpassed in importance by its vast extent ; temples, altars, deities, sculptures, and ornamental stones, bear testimony to its great antiquity.’ He afterwards mentions the remains of an aqueduct here, of sufficient dimensions for a man to walk upright in it ; and other like ruins are to be seen near Ocosingo, in the same district.

The celebrated circus, and other structures in the valley of Copan, in the state of Honduras, are, in part, undoubtedly of later date, because they abound with sculptured figures in the Spanish costume. The circus, so called, consisted of a circular space surrounded by stone pyramids, about six yards high, having in its centre an altar, or elevated place of sacrifice. Near it, suspended between two small pyramids, swung a hammock containing two human figures with the Indian dress, all constructed of stone. In the same valley is the cave of Tibulca, hollowed out of the base of a hill, in the form of a temple,

adorned with columns, and other architectural ornaments. In the district of Solola, we read of the great city of Utatlan, already mentioned; and of other ruins of cities elsewhere; such as Patinamit, near the village of Tecpanguatemala; and Mixco, in the valley of Xilotepeque. And the vestiges and foundations of many large fortresses are still to be seen in the province of Quezaltenango. Of all these buildings, the palaces and castles of Utatlan, appear to have been the most remarkable, especially the grand alcazar of the kings of Quiche, having three hundred and seventy-six paces' length in front, and a depth of seven hundred and twenty-eight, and constructed of hewn stone. After making all reasonable allowance for the exaggerations of Torquemada, Fuentes, and other Spanish writers, enough will remain to show, that the Indians of Guatemala had risen to no inconsiderable height of power and refinement.

Under the government of the *Conquistadores*, and their successors, the native inhabitants, exchanging the condition of independent tribes, for that of a subdued, an inferior, and a depressed race, lost much of their original force of character. As Guatemala, however, was an agricultural, not a mining country, its primitive inhabitants were not subjected to those excesses of grinding despotism, which disgraced the conduct of the Spaniards in Peru and New Granada. Their spirits were not broken here, nor their numbers swept off, by the horrible cruelties of the *mita*. Oppression fell upon them, when it came at all, in the mild form of agricultural labor. And as the Indians of Guatemala had less cause to complain of the whites, than the tribes of their race in other parts of Spanish America, so the Creoles suffered less from the misrule of the mother country, and its greedy emissaries. The government was nominally placed under that of Mexico; but the captain-general of Guatemala, did not acknowledge a very close dependence upon the viceroy of New Spain. To this, and to the peculiar occupations, and spirit of the people, it is owing, that the kingdom of Guatemala was almost the last to embrace the cause of liberty.

But whilst an obstinate struggle for independence was convulsing the neighboring provinces of Venezuela, it is not to be supposed, that the inhabitants of Guatemala were entirely tranquil. Still, the Spanish rule, pressing less heavily upon them, than upon other regions of America more accessible to its in-

fluence, or more stimulating to its cupidity, they had not the same urgent inducement to draw the sword, which actuated the Colombians; nor, if they had set the example of armed resistance to the mother country, could she so readily have made them feel the extremity of her vengeance. Previously to 1821, men of intelligence and influence had been gradually preparing the minds of the inhabitants for a declaration of independence; and in September of that year the decisive step was taken, contemporaneously with the revolutionary movements in Mexico. Unfortunately, however, for Guatemala, the usurper, Iturbide, resolved to make it a part of his empire; and by combined deceit and violence, gained over most of the towns in the province. But Salvador, and part of Nicaragua, refused to submit from the beginning; and when the downfall of the usurper left the other districts free to act, they resumed their original purpose of forming an independent republic, as at present organized. A constituent assembly was immediately called together, which completed the constitution of government for the confederated states, November 22, 1824. Of the five states, Salvador established its constitution first, in June, 1824; Costa Rica followed in January, 1825; Guatemala in October, 1825; Honduras in December, 1825; and lastly, Nicaragua, in April, 1826.

Central America, it is well known, adopted, like Mexico, the political system of the United States, as a model in the formation of its constitutions. A comparison of the two systems, however, while it demonstrates the closeness of the imitation, discloses many remarkable discrepancies, which will best appear, from a brief exposition of the constitution of the confederacy, and that of some one of the individual states.

The federal constitution is not preceded by a declaration of rights, or general principles, but commences by defining the nation, its territory, government and religion, and the conditions of citizenship. It expressly reserves to each state all the power, which it does not confer upon the federal authorities, as the basis of its political system. It establishes the catholic religion, to the exclusion of the public exercise of every other. In respect to citizenship, its provisions are very peculiar, inasmuch as it pronounces every inhabitant of the republic free, and that none are slaves, who claim protection from its laws; none citizens, who traffic in slaves. Every person, past the age of eighteen, or married, is declared a citizen, provided he

exercises any useful profession, or has any known means of subsistence ; but the privilege is lost by the acceptance of hereditary titles, or pensions from a foreign country, or by being convicted of an infamous crime ; and it is suspended during an indictment for such a crime, or by being proved a fraudulent debtor, by notorious profligacy of conduct, by physical or moral incapacity, or by living in the condition of a domestic servant.

For the purposes of elections, each state is divided into *popular juntas*, *districts*, and *departments*. Each popular junta, consists of not less than two hundred and fifty, nor more than twentyfive hundred inhabitants, who choose a primary elector for every two hundred and fifty inhabitants. The primary electors from every popular junta in a district, form the *district junta*, who choose a district elector for every ten primary electors. The district electors of a department united compose the junta of the department ; and these last juntas elect the senators and representatives, and the supreme executive and judicial authorities of the republic.

The legislative power resides in a Congress, composed of representatives, elected annually, in the ratio of one to every twelve district electors, that is, one to every thirty thousand inhabitants. For every three representatives, one substitute also is elected. This body assembles annually the first day of March, continuing in cession three months ; and to it belongs, in addition to the powers vested in the Congress of the United States, express authority to regulate education, to declare war and make peace, to ratify treaties negotiated by the executive, and express authority to construct great roads and canals of internal communication. It belongs to the Senate to sanction (*sancionar*) or reject all laws passed by the Congress, which, when thus passed and sanctioned, it is the duty of the executive instantly to promulgate.

The senate consists of two members and one substitute for each state, elected annually by thirds, to whom it belongs to give or deny sanction to laws, to watch over the integrity of the constitution, to advise the executive authority, to propose a triple list to the president for his nomination, of the principal civil and military officers of the republic, and to declare when there is cause for the impeachment of the public servants.

The president is elected for the period of four years, and exercises the executive power as usually understood in this

country, excepting the right of a *veto* upon laws, and the other qualifications of his authority, before mentioned. The Supreme Court, composed of either five or seven members, to be elected every two years, but capable of perpetual reëlection, in addition to the ordinary powers of such a tribunal, constitutes a high court of impeachment upon information of the senate.

After these provisions for the organization of the government, there follow in the constitution sundry guaranties of personal freedom, as they are termed, and limitations of the legislative authority, in which the fundamental principles of liberty are embodied. Such is the frame of government for the whole republic. Some peculiarities of the state constitutions deserve to be mentioned.

The federal constitution delineates the outline of the form of government to be adopted by the several states, by which means great uniformity is secured, and the constitution of one sufficiently explains those of the rest. We take that of Salvador, the first that was finished, for an example. The legislative body, called a Congress, consists of not less than nine, nor more than twenty-one deputies, elected to serve two years, whose acts are subject to the revision of a representative council, elected for three years; the executive power residing in a governor, denominated supreme chief (*gefe supremo*), whose term of service is four years. Each department is governed by an intendant, appointed by the supreme chief. The constitution of the other states is substantially the same, all of them following the model set, and the general outline prescribed, in the constitution of the whole republic.

Some of the provisions in these systems of government are sufficiently singular, and suggest several useful topics of reflection. We pass on, however, to the subject of the actual condition of Central America, and the progress which the government has made, since the accomplishment of its republican organization. Its foreign relations present nothing of moment for consideration; but internally the unsettled state of the country contradicts the favorable presages, drawn from the bloodless commencement of its career of independence. The general confidence entertained in the character of the president, Manuel José Arce, gave strength and extensive currency to those anticipations of prosperity. But the end has by no means corresponded to the beginning.

The patriots of Guatemala seem, like those in all the South American governments, but with less of plausible reason, than most of their brethren in the other republics can allege, to have proceeded on principles radically erroneous, in their financial affairs. The revenue of Central America arises from maritime duties, from the monopoly of tobacco and gunpowder, and from the post-office. These funds, managed as before the revolution, did not yield enough to cover the estimated expenses of the first year, by eight hundred thousand dollars. Instead of improving the established sources of public revenue, so as to draw from them enough for the public exigencies; or if that could not be done, manfully facing the difficulty, and providing fixed means to meet it permanently; the government resorted to the ruinous expedient of contracting a loan for seven millions and a half, which will prove a serious embarrassment to the infant republic. It is said, indeed, that for the sake of conciliating the popular good will, other productive taxes were inconsiderately abolished at the time of the revolution; the plain ultimate good of the country being sacrificed to promote the purposes of the moment. Nothing could have been more grossly ill judged. At the crisis of the revolution, the finances might have been placed upon a sure foundation, amid the numerous other fundamental changes, which the condition of the people underwent; and any judicious regulations respecting the revenue would easily have passed into the fabric of the government, along with the great mass of political innovations effected at the adoption of the constitution. Least of all ought any of the existing sources of revenue, to which the people were familiarized by long use, to have been abandoned for the destructive substitute of a foreign loan. The violation of these self-evident maxims of political economy must either involve the republic in acts of bad faith, lead to political convulsions, or compel the government to resort to burthensome contributions to replenish the treasury; either of which is greatly to be deprecated. Honduras and Nicaragua, it is represented, are unable to subsist upon their own resources; and can ill afford to yield a contingent for the expenses of the general government, which must fall therefore upon Costa Rica, Salvador, and Guatemala with redoubled weight. It is reasonable to anticipate, from such a state of things, the same disorders which financial embarrassments have produced in other parts of Spanish America.

Unfortunately, too, the resources of Central America are not of such a nature, that she can easily and successfully contend with pecuniary difficulties. It is true, that her government was more economical, until recently, than those of her sister republics, and was enabled to meet the national exigencies with a smaller amount of expenditure. It is true, also, that the resources of the country, if they could be called forth, are not inconsiderable. But the extreme unhealthiness of the northeastern coasts, the badness of the roads, and the absence of water communication capable, at present, of affording convenient means of intercourse with the interior, have depressed the commerce of Central America. Its maritime revenue, for the first year, was not estimated to exceed three hundred thousand dollars. Until a better system can be introduced, the country must, of necessity, continue poor, with little commerce, no manufactures, and scarcely more agriculture than the wants of the people require to supply their home consumption.

Extraordinary advantages, it is well known, have been anticipated for Central America, by the construction of an *Oceanic Canal*, uniting the Atlantic and Pacific seas through the lake of Nicaragua. The idiom of exaggeration, so peculiar to the Spanish tongue, has been racked by the Guatemaltecos for terms of magnificent description, in depicting the beneficial consequences that are to flow from this celebrated project. We fear the time is far distant, when the boasted utility of the canal of Nicaragua will be realized. It is quite certain, at all events, that this canal will not soon be made. The success of the state of New York, in extending her noble canal through a tract of country, more favorable for the purpose, perhaps, than any other in America, has given encouragement to wild speculations on the subject of canals. Especially has it induced our brethren of the South to believe, that no undertaking is too arduous or expensive for the enterprise of North Americans. We read, for instance, in a piece published in Guatemala, exhorting the government to patronize the canal of Nicaragua, such a sentence as the following; ‘The United States of the North have entertained *the project of opening a communication between the two oceans, by a canal of a thousand leagues*, connecting the waters of the Columbia and Mississippi rivers; and we tremble at the idea of cutting through

a plain of five leagues !' \* A project, truly, which we imagine it would stagger the bold enthusiasm even of Captain Symmes to conceive. And yet to raise a stock for a canal over the Rocky Mountains, and for the canal of Nicaragua, on the conditions proposed by the government of Central America, would, we apprehend, be equally practicable. The public expectation having been unduly raised, relative to this matter, by the partial contract made by the government of Central America with Mr Beneski in behalf of Mr Palmer of New York, we deem some explanation of the circumstance proper here, that the credit of our country may not suffer among those, who, from ignorance of the precise nature of our political institutions, do not rightly distinguish between the acts of the nation, and of its individual citizens.

By a resolution passed June 25th, 1825, the Congress of Central America voted, that the canal of Nicaragua should be opened for the vessels of all neutral and friendly nations, and solicited proposals for the undertaking, which were to be rendered to the Executive. Proposals were accordingly made by an agent for the Messrs Barclay of London, and another for Mr Palmer of New York, which resulted in a contract with the latter, concluded in June, 1826. When the question whether this contract should be ratified, came before the Congress, it encountered much opposition; and strong reasons were urged against its ratification by José del Valle, a deputy of distinguished talents, who had been high in station under Iturbide, and was an unsuccessful candidate for the office of first president of the republic. He alleged, that it was premature to contract for the construction of the canal, before it had been ascertained to be practicable; that no surveys had been made of the river San Juan, the lake of Nicaragua, or of the land between that and the Pacific; that all the plans and charts of this region were inaccurate and defective; that however useful such a canal might be, if feasible, yet that the present time was altogether unsuitable for the undertaking; that it was extremely ill advised to have the canal, and with

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\* 'Los Estados Unidos del Norte han ensayado el proyecto de la comunicacion de los mares por un canal de mas de mil leguas, uniendo las ramificaciones de Colombia y el Misisipi; y nosotros temblamos para cortar un plano de cinco leguas !' *El Liberal* (de Guatemala), Mayo 17 de 1826.



it the command of all the resources of the country, in the hands of foreigners; and that, besides, the government had no precise information of the credit or circumstances of the contracting house. If a navigable ship canal should be constructed, he conceived that, being the readiest road to India, it would tempt some foreign power, Great Britain for instance, or an enemy of Great Britain, to seize on Nicaragua, and occupy the fortifications at the mouth of its canal, as a fit position for another Elsinore or Gibraltar. Central America itself was in no settled condition; disputes concerning boundary was still pending with Mexico on the one hand, and Colombia on the other; and serious disturbances existed in the very state of Nicaragua, where the excavations were to be made. He, therefore, urged the Congress to wait until the requisite surveys and calculations could be made, and not to leap into the contract blindfold, but rather, if the project, on satisfactory examination, should be found practicable, to reserve the benefit of it for the republic itself, or its own citizens.

Notwithstanding the cogency of these reasons, the contract was ratified, but clogged at the same time with such onerous conditions, as would almost create a belief that the government did not feel very anxious to have it fulfilled. By the proposals originally presented to the president, a privilege was claimed of navigating the canal by steamboats for thirtyfive years; the contractor was to have one half of the proceeds of the tolls for fifteen years after the capital invested should have been reimbursed; and the capital invested was immediately to be charged upon the republic as a debt, payable at all events by the people, if the project should fail to prove profitable to the undertakers. The enterprise, even upon these terms, would have been very hazardous, because the cost being converted into a loan, might very possibly reduce the nation to bankruptcy, and thus ruin the contractors. But in Palmer's contract, the privilege for steamboats was limited to twenty years; and half the tolls for seven years only, instead of fifteen, was conceded. The republic, moreover, incurred no responsibility for the capital invested, but, on the contrary, immediately on the completion of the canal, was to receive one third of the tolls, leaving but two thirds as a fund to reimburse the contractors.

In fact, they made themselves entirely dependant on the government, which might at any time resume the grant, by

refunding the principal sum laid out, with ten per cent. interest and one half the tolls for seven years. Add to this, that two hundred thousand dollars were to be forthwith advanced, to be expended in the construction of fortifications, and the contractors remained subject to be called upon for further advances, without any limitation as to the amount, or any security for repayment but the remote prospect of uncertain profit. These unanswerable objections proved fatal to the enterprise; because no capitalists did, or could, consider it anything less than extravagant improvidence to adventure in a speculation loaded with such conditions. Had the contract for the canal been made on the terms proposed by the firm of Barclay, and had it been thrown into the English market, when the mania for mining and other joint stock enterprises was at flood, this stock *might* have been subscribed for, at least with such chance of success as other bubbles of the day enjoyed. But we do not believe, that even the daring speculators of that infatuated period could have imparted credit and stability to the stock, on the conditions of the contract as finally concluded.

Having entered so fully into the preceding topics, we shall abstain from relating minutely the circumstances of the unhappy civil dissensions, which have continued to agitate Central America for the past year. This will be the less necessary, because the newspapers have from time to time contained intelligence of the events as they occurred. But the origin of the disturbances not being so generally known, and many misapprehensions having gone abroad in consequence, respecting the motives of the contending parties, we shall simply state the commencement of the troubles, as we find it explained in the papers before us, without vouching for the integrity, either of the government or of its opponents.

The inhabitants of Salvador have long been jealous, it seems, that a strong *central* party existed in Guatemala, the capital at the same time of the most powerful of the confederated states, and of the confederacy itself. They charged the president with having digested a plan of changing the government from the federal to the central form. Even during the session of the first congress, in March, 1826, the Salvadoreños indicated the jealousy in question, by representing to the Congress the necessity of transferring its sessions, and the seat of the executive government, to some place distant at least forty leagues from Guatemala. Petitions to the same effect came

from the towns of Aguachapam, and Metapan, in the state of Salvador. The regular session of Congress closed in June; and in August following, the senate, exercising the discretion conferred upon it by the constitution,\* appointed an extraordinary session of the congress to be holden at Guatemala, the established seat of government, on the first day of October ensuing, to deliberate upon various important subjects demanding immediate attention. At the time fixed for the meeting, only sixteen members attended. As twenty-one were required by the constitution to constitute a quorum; the members convened could not of course legally transact any business, but such as related to their regular organization. In the discharge of this duty, they examined and discussed the reasons assigned by the absent members for not attending, and took measures for procuring their presence.

It soon became apparent, that the members from Salvador designed to refuse attendance at all events. One of them, Marcellino Mendez, sent in a memorial, in which he signified his determination not to attend, unless the Congress was convened at some other place, denied that the decree of the senate set forth any sufficient cause for convoking the Congress, and complained, that among the subjects for its consideration, they had omitted to insert the question, left undecided by the preceding Congress, whether the seat of government should be removed. This document was justly regarded as a kind of public declaration of the feelings of the people of Salvador, whose unfriendly sentiments towards the Guatemaltecos (whether justly conceived or not, we do not judge) were otherwise sufficiently known. The result of the whole was, that the legislature of the state of Guatemala authorized the levy of a body of militia, under the name of defenders of the constitution.

Meanwhile the members of the Congress had continued their preparatory sessions, until October tenth, when the president of the republic issued a decree, ordering the convocation of an extraordinary congress at Cojutepeque, in the state of Salvador, to consist of two delegates for every thirty thousand inhabitants, and to be invested with unlimited authority to provide for the national necessities, and preserve the public tranquillity. This

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\* *Constitucion de Centro-America*, T. vi, s. 2, art. 101. 'Convocarà al Congreso en casos extraordinarios.'

decree was immediately declared unconstitutional and void, by the Supreme Court; and being communicated to the regular Congress, they also voted that it was an act of arbitrary power on the part of the president, and that they could not observe it, either as individuals or as public functionaries.

Guatemala, on the one hand, yielded a qualified submission to the president's decree, and proceeded to elect delegates for the extraordinary congress. Salvador, on the other hand, took the lead in opposing it; and had she confined her opposition to the constitutional means of resistance, the affair might have terminated without bloodshed. But various events occurred, having a tendency to exasperate the minds of all concerned, and the breath of party spirit fanned the flame of discord, till it broke forth into a civil war. Early in 1827, the government of Salvador levied troops, and caused them to be gradually concentrated upon points convenient for invading the territory of Guatemala. This measure was the signal for actual hostilities. The Guatemaltecos considering themselves threatened with an attack from the Salvadoreños, prepared for the worst. After various intermediate movements, the troops of Salvador marched upon the city of Guatemala, amounting to twelve or fourteen hundred in number, and headed by Nicolas Raoul, Isidoro Saget, and Cleto Ordoñez. An engagement ensued in the neighborhood of the capital, which resulted in the defeat and dispersion of the invading force, and the complete triumph of the Guatemaltecos. Such was the origin of the unfortunate dissensions, which have agitated the new republic, and the present effects and future consequences of which, may prove disastrous to its prosperity. We sincerely hope, however, for that entire reëstablishment of the constitutional government, and that permanent restoration of peace and good order to the nation, which the latest accounts encourage us to expect.